# THE COMMON PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ROME

## STUDIES OF ROMAN LIFE AND LITERATURE

BY

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# PREFATORY NOTE

THIS book, like the volume on "Society and Politics in Ancient Rome," deals with the life of the common people, with their language and literature, their occupations and amusements, and with their social, political, and economic conditions. We are interested in the common people of Rome because they made the Roman Empire what it was. They carried the Roman standards to the Euphrates and the Atlantic; they lived abroad aŝ traders, farmers, and soldiers to hold and Romanize the provinces, or they stayed at home, working as carpenters, masons, or bakers, to supply the daily needs of the capital.

The other side of the subject which has engaged the attention of the author in studying these topics has been the many points of similarity which arise between ancient and modern conditions, and between the problems which the Roman faced and those which confront us. What policy shall the government

adopt toward corporations? How can the cost of living be kept down? What effect have private benefactions on the character of a people? Shall a nation try to introduce its own language into the territory of a subject people, or shall it allow the native language to be used, and, if it seeks to introduce its own tongue, how can it best accomplish its object? The Roman attacked all these questions, solved some of them admirably, and failed with others egregiously. His successes and his failures are perhaps equally illuminating, and the fact that his attempts to improve social and economic conditions run through a period of a thousand years should make the study of them of the greater interest and value to us.

Of the chapters which this book contains, the article on "The Origin of the Realistic Romance among the Romans" appeared originally in *Classical Philology*, and the author is indebted to the editors of that periodical for permission to reprint it here. The other papers are now published for the first time.

It has not seemed advisable to refer to the sources to substantiate every opinion which

has been expressed, but a few references have been given in the foot-notes mainly for the sake of the reader who may wish to follow some subject farther than has been possible in these brief chapters. The proofs had to be corrected while the author was away from his own books, so that he was unable to make a final verification of two or three of the citations, but he trusts that they, as well as the others, are accurate. He takes this opportunity to acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. Donald Blythe Durham, of Princeton University, for the preparation of the index.

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## HOW LATIN BECAME THE LANGUAGE OF THE WORLD

HOW the armies of Rome mastered the nations of the world is known to every reader of history, but the story of the conquest by Latin of the languages of the world is vague in the minds of most of us. If we should ask ourselves how it came about, we should probably think of the world-wide supremacy of Latin as a natural result of the world-wide supremacy of the Roman legions or of Roman law. But in making this assumption we should be shutting our eyes to the history of our own times. A conquered people does not necessarily accept, perhaps it has not commonly accepted, the tongue of its master. In his "Ancient and Modern Imperialism" Lord Cromer states that in India only one hundred people in every ten thousand can read and write English, and this condition exists after an occupation of one hundred and fifty years or more. He adds: "There does

not appear the least prospect of French supplanting Arabic in Algeria." In comparing the results of ancient and modern methods perhaps he should have taken into account the fact that India and Algeria have literatures of their own, which most of the outlying peoples subdued by Rome did not have, and these literatures may have strengthened the resistance which the tongue of the conquered people has offered to that of the conqueror, but, even when allowance is made for this fact, the difference in resultant conditions is surprising. From its narrow confines, within a little district on the banks of the Tiber, covering, at the close of the fifth century B. C., less than a hundred square miles, Latin spread through Italy and the islands of the Mediterranean, through France, Spain, England, northern Africa, and the Danubian provinces, triumphing over all the other tongues of those regions more completely than Roman arms triumphed over the peoples using them.

In tracing the story we must keep in our mind's eye the linguistic geography of Italy, just as we must remember the political geography of the peninsula in following Rome's territorial expansion. Let us think at the out-

set, then, of a little strip of flat country on the Tiber, dotted here and there with hills crowned with villages. Such hill towns were Rome, Tusculum, and Præneste, for instance. Each of them was the stronghold and market-place of the country immediately about it, and therefore had a life of its own, so that although Latin was spoken in all of them it varied from one to the other. This is shown clearly enough by the inscriptions which have been found on the sites of these ancient towns,[1] and as late as the close of the third century before our era, Plautus pokes fun in his comedies at the provincialism of Prænestе.

The towns which we have mentioned were only a few miles from Rome. Beyond them, and occupying central Italy and a large part of southern Italy, were people who spoke Oscan and the other Italic dialects, which were related to Latin, and yet quite distinct from it. In the seaports of the south Greek was spoken, while the Messapians and Iapygians occupied Calabria. To the north of Rome were the mysterious Etruscans and the almost equally puzzling Venetians and Ligurians. When we follow the Roman legions across the Alps into

[1] *Cf.* A. Ernout, *Le Parler de Préneste*, Paris, 1905.

Switzerland, France, England, Spain, and Africa, we enter a jungle, as it were, of languages and dialects. A mere reading of the list of tongues with which Latin was brought into contact, if such a list could be drawn up, would bring weariness to the flesh. In the part of Gaul conquered by Cæsar, for instance, he tells us that there were three independent languages, and sixty distinct states, whose peoples doubtless differed from one another in their speech. If we look at a map of the Roman world under Augustus, with the Atlantic to bound it on the west, the Euphrates on the east, the desert of Sahara on the south, and the Rhine and Danube on the north, and recall the fact that the linguistic conditions which Cæsar found in Gaul in 58 B. C. were typical of what confronted Latin in a great many of the western, southern, and northern provinces, the fact that Latin subdued all these different tongues, and became the every-day speech of these different peoples, will be recognized as one of the marvels of history. In fact, so firmly did it establish itself, that it withstood the assaults of the invading Gothic, Lombardic, Frankish, and Burgundian, and has continued to hold to our own day a very

large part of the territory which it acquired some two thousand years ago.

That Latin was the common speech of the western world is attested not only by the fact that the languages of France, Spain, Roumania, and the other Romance countries descend from it, but it is also clearly shown by the thousands of Latin inscriptions composed by freeman and freedman, by carpenter, baker, and soldier, which we find all over the Roman world.

How did this extraordinary result come about? It was not the conquest of the world by the common language of Italy, because in Italy in early days at least nine different languages were spoken, but its subjugation by the tongue spoken in the city of Rome. The traditional narrative of Rome, as Livy and others relate it, tells us of a struggle with the neighboring Latin hill towns in the early days of the Republic, and the ultimate formation of an alliance between them and Rome. The favorable position of the city on the Tiber for trade and defence gave it a great advantage over its rivals, and it soon became the commercial and political centre of the neighboring territory. The most important of these

villages, Tusculum, Præneste, and Lanuvium, were not more than twenty miles distant, and the people in them must have come constantly to Rome to attend the markets, and in later days to vote, to hear political speeches, and to listen to plays in the theatre. Some of them probably heard the jests at the expense of their dialectal peculiarities which Plautus introduced into his comedies. The younger generations became ashamed of their provincialisms; they imitated the Latin spoken in the metropolis, and by the second century of our era, when the Latin grammarians have occasion to cite dialectal peculiarities from Latium outside Rome, they quote at second-hand from Varro of the first century B. C., either because they will not take the trouble to use their own ears or because the differences which were noted in earlier days had ceased to exist. The first stage in the conquest of the world by the Latin of Rome comes to an end, then, with the extension of that form of speech throughout Latium.

Beyond the limits of Latium it came into contact with Oscan and the other Italic dialects, which were related to Latin, but of course were much farther removed from it

than the Latin of Tusculum or Lanuvium had been,[1] so that the adoption of Latin was not so simple a matter as the acceptance of Roman Latin by the villages of Latium near Rome had been.

The conflict which went on between Latin and its Italic kinsmen is revealed to us now and then by a Latin inscription, into which Oscan or Umbrian forms have crept.[2] The struggle had come to an end by the beginning of our era. A few Oscan inscriptions are found scratched on the walls of Pompeii after the first earthquake, in 63 A. D., but they are late survivals, and no Umbrian inscriptions are known of a date subsequent to the first century B. C.

The Social War of 90–88 B. C., between Rome and the Italians, was a turning-point in the struggle between Latin and the Italic

[1] The relation between Latin and the Italic dialects may be illustrated by an extract or two from them with a Latin translation. An Umbrian specimen may be taken from one of the bronze tablets found at Iguvium, which reads in Umbrian: Di Grabouie, saluo seritu ocrem Fisim, saluam seritu totam Iiouinam (*Iguvinian Tables* VI, a. 51), and in Latin: Deus Grabovi, salvam servato arcem Fisiam, salvam servato civitatem Iguvinam. A bit of Oscan from the Tabula Bantina (Tab. Bant. 2, 11) reads: suaepis contrud exeic fefacust auti comono hipust, molto etanto estud, and in Latin: siquis contra hoc fecerit aut comitiá habuerit, multa tanta esto.

[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, IX, 782, furnishes a case in point.

dialects, because it marks a change in the political treatment of Rome's dependencies in Italy. Up to this time she had followed the policy of isolating all her Italian conquered communities from one another. She was anxious to prevent them from conspiring against her. Thus, with this object in view, she made differences in the rights and privileges granted to neighboring communities, in order that, not being subject to the same limitations, and therefore not having the same grievances, they might not have a common basis for joint action against her. It would naturally be a part of that policy to allow or to encourage the retention by the several communities of their own dialects. The common use of Latin would have enabled them to combine against her with greater ease. With the conclusion of the Social War this policy gave way before the new conception of political unity for the people of Italian stock, and with political unity came the introduction of Latin as the common tongue in all official transactions of a local as well as of a federal character. The immediate results of the war, and the policy which Rome carried out at its close of sending out colonies and building roads in

Italy, contributed still more to the larger use of Latin throughout the central and southern parts of the peninsula. Samnium, Lucania, and the territory of the Bruttii suffered severely from depopulation; many colonies were sent into all these districts, so that, although the old dialects must have persisted for a time in some of the mountain towns to the north of Rome, the years following the conclusion of the Social War mark the rapid disappearance of them and the substitution of Latin in their place. Campania took little part in the war, and was therefore left untouched. This fact accounts probably for the occurrence of a few Oscan inscriptions on the walls of Pompeii as late as 63 A. D.

We need not follow here the story of the subjugation of the Greek seaports in southern Italy and of the peoples to the north who spoke non-Italic languages. In all these cases Latin was brought into conflict with languages not related to itself, and the situation contains slightly different elements from those which present themselves in the struggle between Latin and the Italic dialects. The latter were nearly enough related to Latin to furnish some

support for the theory that Latin was modified by contact with them, and this theory has found advocates,[1] but there is no sufficient reason for believing that it was materially influenced. An interesting illustration of the influence of Greek on the Latin of every-day life is furnished by the realistic novel which Petronius wrote in the middle of the first century of our era. The characters in his story are Greeks, and the language which they speak is Latin, but they introduce into it a great many Greek words, and now and then a Greek idiom or construction.

The Romans, as is well known, used two agencies with great effect in Romanizing their newly acquired territory, viz., colonies and roads. The policy of sending out colonists to hold the new districts was definitely entered upon in the early part of the fourth century, when citizens were sent to Antium, Tarracina, and other points in Latium. Within this century fifteen or twenty colonies were established at various points in central Italy. Strategic considerations determined their location, and the choice was made with great wisdom.

[1] *Cf.* G. Mohl, *Introduction à la chronologie du Latin vulgaire*, Paris, 1899.